

Islamic fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism has been defined as a movement of Muslims who regard earlier times favorably and seek to return to the fundamentals of the Islamic religion^[1] and live similarly to how the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his companions lived. Islamic fundamentalists favor "a literal and originalist interpretation" of the primary sources of Islam (the Quran and

Sunnah),^[2] seek to eliminate (what they perceive to be) "corrupting" non-Islamic influences from every part of their lives^[3] and see "Islamic fundamentalism" as a pejorative term used by outsiders for Islamic revivalism and Islamic activism.^[4]

Definitions and descriptions

Definitions vary as to what Islamic fundamentalism exactly is and how, if at all, it differs from Islamism (or political Islam) or Islamic revivalism. The term fundamentalism has been deemed "misleading" by those who suggest that all mainstream Muslims believe in the

literal divine origin and perfection of the Quran and are therefore "fundamentalists",^[5] and others who believe it is a term that is used by outsiders in order to describe perceived trends within Islam.^[6] Some exemplary Islamic fundamentalists include Sayyid Qutb, Abul Ala Mawdudi,^[7] and Israr Ahmed.^[8] The Wahhabi movement and its funding by Saudi Arabia is often described as being responsible for the popularity of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. From this specific regional context, islamic fundamentalism can be seen as a branch of the far-right.^[9]

- Form of Islamism – Graham Fuller believes that Islamic fundamentalism is a subset of Islamism rather than a distinctive form of it, and to him, Islamic fundamentalists are "the most conservative element among Islamists." Its "strictest form" includes "Wahhabism, which is sometimes referred to as salafiyya. ... For fundamentalists the law is the most essential component of Islam, and it leads to an overwhelming emphasis upon jurisprudence, usually narrowly conceived."^[10] Author Olivier Roy takes a similar line, describing "neo-fundamentalists", (i.e. contemporary fundamentalists) as being more

passionate than earlier Islamists in their opposition to the perceived "corrupting influence of Western culture," avoiding Western dress, "neckties, laughter, the use of Western forms of salutation, handshakes, applause," discouraging but not forbidding other activities such as sports, ideally limiting the Muslim public space to "the family and the mosque."^[11] In this fundamentalists have "drifted" away from the stand of the Islamists of the 1970s and 80s, such as [Abul A'la Maududi] who

...didn't hesitate to attend Hindu ceremonies. Khomeini

never proposed giving Iranian Christians and Jews the status of dhimmi (protected communities) as provided for in the sharia: the Armenians of Iran have remained Iranian citizens, are required to perform military service and pay the same taxes as Muslims, and have the right to vote (with separate electoral colleges). Similarly, the Afghan Jamaat, in its statutes, has declared it legal to employ non-

Muslims as experts in the eyes of Islam.^[3]

- Umbrella term – Another American observer, Robert Pelletreau, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, believes it the other way around, Islamism being the subset of Muslims "with political goals ... within" the "broader fundamentalist revival".^[12] American historian Ira Lapidus sees Islamic fundamentalism as "an umbrella designation for a very wide variety of movements, some intolerant and exclusivist, some pluralistic; some favourable to science,

some anti-scientific; some primarily devotional and some primarily political; some democratic, some authoritarian; some pacific, some violent."^[13]

- Islamism in Pakistani scholar Husnul Amin's conceptualization is shaped by three main interconnected aspects: (a) political interpretation of the religious text and thus blurring of categories of collective obligation and personal obligation; (b) socio-political struggle to enforce sharia, pursuance of an Islamization program through the institutional arrangements of the state, and re-affirmation of Islam as a “blueprint” of socio-economic order; and (c) Islamists’ openness to adopt and

deploy all modern forms of propaganda machinery, technology, print and electronic media, and other opportunities opened by the market and politics. "Islamists" refer to activists, leaders and intellectuals who subscribe to the ideology of Islamism.^[14]

- Synonym – Still another, Martin Kramer, sees little difference between the two terms: "To all intents and purposes, Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism have become synonyms in contemporary American usage."^[15]
- Scriptural literalism – According to another academic, Natana J. Delong-

Bas, the contemporary use of the term Islamic fundamentalism applies to Muslims who not seek not just "to return to the primary sources", but who use "a literal interpretation of those sources."^[2]

- Use of *ijtihad* in Islamic law – According to academic John Esposito, one of the most defining features of Islamic fundamentalism is belief in the "reopening" of the gates of *ijtihad* ("independent reasoning" used in reaching a legal decision in Sunni law).^[16]

Differences with Islamism

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According to Roy distinctions between Fundamentalism and Islamism (or at least pre-1990 Islamism) are in the fields of:

- Politics and economics. Islamists often talk of "revolution" and they believe "that the society will only be Islamized through social and political action: it is necessary to leave the mosque ..." Fundamentalists are primarily interested in revolution, less interested in "modernity or Western models of politics or economics," and less willing to associate with non-Muslims.^[17]

- Sharia. While both Islamists and fundamentalists are committed to implementing Sharia law, Islamists "tend to consider it more a project than a corpus."^[18]
- Issue of women. "Islamists generally tend to favour the education of women and their participation in social and political life: the Islamist woman militates, studies, and has the right to work, but in a chador. Islamist groups include women's associations." While the fundamentalist preaches that women should return to their homes, Islamism believes that it is sufficient if "the sexes are separated in public."^[19]

- Variety and diversity within Islamic social movements has been highlighted by Husnul Amin in his work by referring to plurality within these movements.^[20]

Types

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Islamic fundamentalism (at least among Sunni Muslims) traditionally tends to fall into "traditionalist" and "reformist" tendencies:

- Traditionalists accept "the continuity" between the founding Islamic "texts"—the Quran and the Sunnah—and their commentaries. Traditionalists take "imitation" (taqlid), accepting what was

said before and refusing to innovate (bidah), as a "basic principle, They follow one of the great schools of religious jurisprudence (Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali). Their vision of the sharia is essentially legalistic and used to determine what is religiously right or wrong for Enjoining good and forbidding wrong. Traditionalists are sometimes connected to the popular forms of Sufism such as the Barelvi school in Pakistan)."[21]

- "reformist" fundamentalism, in contrast, "criticizes the tradition, the commentaries, popular religious practices" (Maraboutism, the cult of saints), "deviations, and superstitions";

it aims to purify Islam by returning to the Quran and the Sunnah. 18th-century examples are Shah Waliullah Dehlawi in India and Abdul Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula. This reformism is often "developed in response to an external threat" such as "the influence of Hinduism on Islam". In the late 19th century salafiyya was developed in the Arab countries, "marking a phase between Fundamentalism and Islamism."^[21]

Controversy

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Criticism of the term

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The term "Islamic fundamentalism" has been criticized by Bernard Lewis, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Eli Berman, John Esposito, among others. Many have proposed substituting another term, such as "puritanical", "Islamic revivalism" or "activism", and "Radical Islam".

Lewis, a leading historian of Islam, believes that although "the use of this term is established and must be accepted":

It remains unfortunate and can be misleading.

"Fundamentalist" is a Christian term. It seems to have come

into use in the early years of last century, and denotes certain Protestant churches and organizations, more particularly those that maintain the literal divine origin and inerrancy of the Bible. In this they oppose the liberal and modernist theologians, who tend to a more critical, historical view of Scripture. Among Muslim theologians there is as yet no such liberal or modernist approach to the Qur'an, and all

Muslims, in their attitude to the text of the Qur'an, are in principle at least fundamentalists. Where the so-called Muslim fundamentalists differ from other Muslims and indeed from Christian fundamentalists is in their scholasticism and their legalism. They base themselves not only on the Qur'an, but also on the Traditions of the Prophet, and on the corpus of transmitted theological and legal learning.^[22]

John Esposito has attacked the term for its association "with political activism, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism," saying "I prefer to speak of Islamic revivalism and Islamic activism."^[4]

Khaled Abou El Fadl of UCLA, a critic of those called Islamic Fundamentalists, also finds fault with the term because:

[M]any liberal, progressive, or moderate Muslims would describe themselves as usulis, or fundamentalist, without thinking that this carries a negative connotation. In the

Islamic context, it makes much more sense to describe the fanatical reductionism and narrow-minded literalism of some groups as puritanical (a term that in the West invokes a particular historical experience)^[23]

Eli Berman argues that "Radical Islam" is a better term for many post-1920s movements starting with the Muslim Brotherhood, because these movements are seen to practice "unprecedented extremism", thus not qualifying as return to historic fundamentals.^[24]

Defense

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In contrast, American author Anthony J. Dennis accepts the widespread usage and relevance of the term and calls Islamic fundamentalism "more than a religion today, it is a worldwide revolutionary movement." He notes the intertwining of social, religious and political goals found within the movement and states that Islamic fundamentalism "deserves to be seriously studied and debated from a secular perspective as a revolutionary ideology."^[25]

At least two Muslim academics, Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal al-Azm and

Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi, have defended the use of the phrase. Surveying the doctrines of the new Islamic movements, Al-Azm found them to consist of "an immediate return to Islamic 'basics' and 'fundamentals'. ... It seems to me quite reasonable that calling these Islamic movements 'Fundamentalist' (and in the strong sense of the term) is adequate, accurate, and correct."^[26]

Hassan Hanafi reached the same conclusion: "It is difficult to find a more appropriate term than the one recently used in the West, 'fundamentalism,' to

cover the meaning of what we name Islamic awakening or revival."^[27]

Study

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In 1988, the University of Chicago, backed by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, launched The Fundamentalism Project, devoted to researching fundamentalism in the world's major religions, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. It defined fundamentalism as "approach, or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group ... by a selective retrieval

of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past."^[28] A 2013 study by Wissenschaftszentrums Berlin für Sozialforschung finds that Islamic fundamentalism is widespread among European Muslims with the majority saying religious rules are more important than civil laws and three quarters rejecting religious pluralism within Islam.^[29] A recent study shows that some European Muslims perceive Western governments as inherently hostile towards Islam as a source of identity. This perception, however, declined significantly after the emergence of ISIS, especially among

young and educated European Muslims.
[30]

Origins

The modern Islamic fundamentalist movements have their origins in the late 19th century.^[31] The Wahhabi movement, an Arabian fundamentalist movement that began in the 18th century, gained traction and spread during the 19th and 20th centuries.^[32] During the Cold War following World War II, some NATO governments, particularly those of the United States and the United Kingdom, launched covert and overt campaigns to encourage and strengthen

fundamentalist groups in the Middle East and southern Asia. These groups were seen as a hedge against potential expansion by the Soviet Union, and as a means to prevent the growth of nationalistic movements that were not necessarily favorable toward the interests of the Western nations.^[33] By the 1970s, the Islamists had become important allies in supporting governments, such as Egypt, which were friendly to U.S. interests. By the late 1970s, however, some fundamentalist groups had become militaristic leading to threats and changes to existing regimes. The overthrow of the Shah in Iran and rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini

was one of the most significant signs of this shift.^[34] Subsequently, fundamentalist forces in Algeria caused a civil war, caused a near-civil war in Egypt, and caused the downfall of the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.^[35] In many cases the military wings of these groups were supplied with money and arms by the U.S. and U.K.

Muslim critics of Islamic fundamentalism often draw a parallel between the modern fundamentalist movement and the 7th century Khawarij sect. From their essentially political position, the Kharijites developed extreme doctrines that set them apart

from both mainstream Sunni and Shia Muslims. The Kharijites were particularly noted for adopting a radical approach to Takfir, whereby they declared other Muslims to be unbelievers and therefore deemed them worthy of death.^{[36][37][38]}

Interpretation of texts

Islamic fundamentalists, or at least "reformist" fundamentalists, believe that Islam is based on the Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah and "criticize the tradition, the commentaries, popular religious practices (maraboutism, the cult of saints), deviations, and superstitions. They aim to return to the founding

texts."^[21] Examples of individuals who adhere to this tendency are the 18th-century Shah Waliullah in India and Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula.^[21] This view is commonly associated with Salafism today.

Social and political goals

As with adherents of other fundamentalist movements,^[39] Islamic fundamentalists hold that the problems of the world stem from secular influences.

Some scholars of Islam, such as Bassam Tibi, believe that, contrary to their own

message, Islamic fundamentalists are not actually traditionalists. He refers to fatwahs issued by fundamentalists such as "every Muslim who pleads for the suspension of the shari'a is an apostate and can be killed. The killing of those apostates cannot be prosecuted under Islamic law because this killing is justified" as going beyond, and unsupported by, the Qur'an. Tibi asserts, "The command to slay reasoning Muslims is un-Islamic, an invention of Islamic fundamentalists". [40][41]

Conflicts with the secular state

Islamic fundamentalism's push for *sharia* and an Islamic state has come into conflict with conceptions of the secular, democratic state, such as the internationally supported Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Anthony J. Dennis notes that "Western and Islamic visions of the state, the individual and society are not only divergent, they are often totally at odds."^[42] Among human rights^[43] disputed by fundamentalist Muslims are:

- Freedom from religious police
- Equality issues between men and women^[44]
- Separation of religion and state^[45]

- Freedom of speech^[46]
- Freedom of religion^{[47][48][49][50][51][52][53]}

Islamic fundamentalist states

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran is seen by some scholars as a success of Islamic fundamentalism.^{[54][55][56]} Some scholars argue that Saudi Arabia is also largely governed by fundamentalist principles (see Wahhabi movement)^[57] but Johannes J.G. Jansen disagrees, arguing that it is more akin to a traditional Muslim state, where a power separation exists between "princes" (*umarā*) and "scholars" (*ulama*).^[58] In contrast, Jansen argues Khomeini came

to power advocating a system of Islamic government where the highest authority is the hands of the *ulamā* (see *Wilayat al Faqih*).^[59]

Islamic fundamentalist groups

Islamic fundamentalist groups include Al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf, Ansar al-Islam, Armed Islamic Group of Algeria, Army of Islam, Boko Haram, Taliban, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Jemaah Islamiyah, Hamas, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Indian Mujahideen, Islamic

State of Iraq and the Levant, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan among many others.

Islamic State

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Caucasus Emirate

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Caucasus Emirate is a fundamentalist Islamic terrorist group residing primarily in the North Caucasus of Russia. Created from the remnants of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) in October 2007, it adheres to an ideology of Salafist-takfiri jihad^[60] that seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate within the North Caucasus and Volga region (primarily the republics of Tatarstan and

Bashkortostan). Many of their fighters are also present in jihadist battlegrounds such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and throughout Central Asia. Many plots involving Chechen and other indigenous ethnic groups of the North Caucasus have also been thwarted in Europe over the recent years.

Al-Shabaab

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Al-Shabaab, meaning "the Youth", is a Somalia-based cell of the militant Islamist group al-Qaeda, formally recognized in 2012.^[61] Al-Shabaab is designated as a terrorist group by countries including Australia, Canada,

Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom,^[62]
and the United States.

Boko Haram

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Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad (Arabic: جماعة أهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد Jamā'a Ahl al-sunnah li-da'wa wa al-jihād), better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram (pronounced [bō:kò:hàrâm], "Western education is sinful"), is a jihadist militant organization based in the northeast of Nigeria. It is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man-made laws and

westernization. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001, the organization seeks to establish sharia law in the country. The group is also known for attacking Christians and bombing Mosques and churches.

The movement is divided into three factions. In 2011, Boko Haram was responsible for at least 450 killings in Nigeria. It was also reported that they had been responsible for over 620 deaths over the first 6 months of 2012. Since its founding in 2001, the jihadists have been responsible for between 3,000 and 10,000 deaths.

The group became known internationally following sectarian violence in Nigeria in July 2009, which left over 1000 people dead. They do not have a clear structure or evident chain of command. Moreover, it is still a matter of debate whether Boko Haram has links to terror outfits outside Nigeria and its fighters have frequently clashed with Nigeria's central government. A US commander stated that Boko Haram is likely linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), although professor Paul Lubeck points out that no evidence is presented for any claims of material international support.

Ansar Dine

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Ansar Dine is an Islamist militant group in the country of Mali that wants Shariah law in Mali.^{[63][64]} It opposes Sufi shrines.^[65] Its main support comes from the Ifora tribe of Tuaregs.^[66] The group is connected to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.^[64]

It took part in the 2012 Tuareg Rebellion.^[67] They destroyed the tomb of a Sufi saint which was a UNESCO World Heritage Site.^[68] It managed to take control of Northern Mali,^[69] and they formed a pact with the MNLA forming the Islamic Republic of Azawad.^[70]

It is designated a terrorist group by the United States Department of State^[71] and the United Nations Security Council.^[72]

Ansar al-Sharia

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Human rights controversy

Some states and movements that are perceived or claimed to be islamic fundamentalists have been criticized for their human rights record by international organizations. The acceptance of international law on human rights has been somewhat limited even in Muslim

countries that are not seen as fundamentalist. Ann Elizabeth Mayer writes that states with a predominantly Muslim population, even when they adopt laws along European lines, are influenced by Islamic rules and precepts of *sharia*, which cause conflict with international law on human rights.

According to Mayer, features found in conflict include severe deficiencies in criminal procedure, harsh criminal penalties causing great suffering, discrimination against women and non-Muslims, and prohibition against abandoning the Islamic religion. In 1990, under Saudi leadership, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a group

representing all Muslim majority nations, adopted the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, which substantially diverges from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The Cairo declaration lacks provisions for democratic principles, protection for religious freedom, freedom of association and freedom of the press, as well as equality in rights and equal protection under the law. Further it stipulates that "all the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic *shari'a*".^[73]

The Cairo declaration followed years of limited acceptance of the Universal

declaration by predominantly Muslim states. As an example, in 1984, Iran's UN representative, Said Raja'i Khorasani, said the following amid allegations of human rights violations, "[Iran] recognized no authority ... apart from Islamic law.... Conventions, declarations and resolutions or decisions of international organizations, which were contrary to Islam, had no validity in the Islamic Republic of Iran.... The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represented secular understanding of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, could not be implemented by Muslims and did not accord with the system of values recognized by the Islamic Republic of

Iran; this country would therefore not hesitate to violate its provisions."^[73]

These departures, both theoretical and practical, have resulted in a multitude of practices and cases criticized by international human rights groups. See human rights in Iran, human rights in Saudi Arabia, and Taliban treatment of women for specific examples.

Opinion polling

In a 2005 Lowy Institute for International Policy Poll 57% of Australians indicated they are worried about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.^{[74][75][76]} Amos N.

Guiora noted that this is equivalent to the

number of Australians who perceived American Foreign Policy as a threat, he further noted that not just Muslim countries have an unfavourable opinion of the United States but a large number of western countries such as: France, Germany, Great Britain and Spain and concluded that Australia was not an outlier on this regard.^[77] The Lowly Institute claimed that the result "raised eyebrows."

- A New York Times poll found that 33% of Americans think that Muslim Americans were more "sympathetic to terrorists than other Citizens" Rik Coolsaet analysed this as indicating a

high level of distrust directed at the American Muslim community.^[78] The *Times* did this survey during the Park51 Ground Zero Mosque incident. The *Times* called the findings "appalling" and also analysed the data as showing a very high level of distrust of Muslim Americans and robust disapproval of the Park51 Mosque proposal.^[79] *The New Republic* stated that it does not trust the poll carried out by the New York Times and that the figures would be higher than 33%. They further claimed that New York residents are tolerant and if the figures were 33% in New York then "non-New Yorker fellow citizens are far more

deeply biased and warped than the Gotham locals".^[80]

See also

- 2009 Diyala Province Bombing
- Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah (organisation)
- Anwar al-Awlaki
- Forced conversion in Islam
- Islamic extremism
- Islamic terrorism
- Mona Mahmudnizhad
- Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi
- Muslim Patrol
- Salafi

- Wahhabi movement
- Deobandi movement

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